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Defense 'Meddling' by Senate Unit

Scarcely noticed but profoundly important to the conduct of foreign policy by the President is the action of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee a few days ago in announcing the formation of a special subcommittee to review "the international military commitments of the United States and their relationship to foreign policy."

Under the Constitution, the President conducts foreign relations and, as commander-in-chief of the armed forces, he supervises the military operations of the United States here and abroad. For Congress to endeavor to intervene in the making of military and foreign policy would not be objectionable if efforts were confined to advice given to the chief executive in private councils. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee, however, in its statement of purposes, says that the subcommittee will not limit its hearings to closed meetings but will also have "public" sessions.

This means that a committee of Congress will be raising questions about the continuance of American commitments abroad and that the handling of negotiations with other governments by the President will be subject to handicaps which could impair the normal processes of diplomatic intercourse.

Certainly the Communists will take advantage of this opportunity to create doubts throughout the world about American resoluteness. Latin American nations, for instance, which have been closely allied with this country may be led to believe that the con-

structive policies applied in the past toward other nations on this continent now are to be modified materially, if not abandoned.

The statement by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee points out that the United States is by treaty committed "under varying circumstances, to use its armed forces in defense of 42 countries." But the Senate itself has ratified these treaties, and, according to the words of the Constitution, they have become the "supreme law of the land."

Five major resolutions by Congress also are mentioned in the committee announcement as having delegated "various degrees of authority to the president to involve the United States in military, economic, or political action abroad—in Formosa and the Pescadores, the Middle East, Berlin, Cuba, and Southeast Asia."

A re-examination of all such resolutions is, of course, within the power of Congress. But a public questioning by a Senate committee of the many delicate aspects of America's relations with other countries of the world might do more harm than good. It could interfere with the handling of important negotiations.

Foreign governments, moreover, may begin to wonder whether hereafter a President whose party does not have a majority in the Senate is to be controlled in the making of foreign policy by the opposite political party and whether existing commitments are to be weakened or even forsaken. Incidentally, the Senate has

an Armed Services Committee which is supposed to deal with military programs and the allocation of public money for these purposes. Defense appropriations have not hitherto been passed upon by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. So it becomes pertinent to ask why the latter group now feels it has the right publicly to cast doubt on the reasons—often necessarily a secret matter—why the executive branch of the government has been authorizing military installations or the presence of American forces in certain countries.

While the North Atlantic Treaty, for instance, has been ratified by the Senate, the decision whether to leave a certain number of troops in Europe to help defend that continent is a military question that is closely related to the defense of the United States. It certainly would be establishing a precedent for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to consider itself authorized to review the military operations of the armed services by citing as an excuse that this has an "impact" on foreign policy.

The most important question raised, however, is whether the United States will keep its word when it promises to help other nations, or whether an opposition political party can meddle at will with foreign relations. Whatever the reasons, political or other, such action will create the impression that Congress does not have enough confidence in the President to permit him, as the Constitution provides, to conduct foreign policy.

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